



Fact Sheet:

H.R. 5852—21st Century Emergency Communications Act of 2006

Committee on Homeland Security

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Science and Technology

Rep. Dave Reichert, Chairman

Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita last year, the nation witnessed emergency response problems at all levels of government – federal, state, and local. Not surprisingly, a key contributing factor was the inability of first responders, emergency managers, the military, and others to communicate effectively, both at the scene and with other federal, state, and local units throughout the region.

The “21st Century Emergency Communications Act of 2006,” introduced by U.S. Reps. Dave Reichert (R-WA) and Bill Pascrell (D-NJ) with 9 original cosponsors, is the product of a series of hearings held by the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Science, and Technology, as well as dozens of meetings with first responders and emergency managers from across the country. The bill, originally approved as part of the Committee on Homeland Security’s Hurricane Katrina “Lessons Learned” legislation, takes the necessary steps to enhance operable and interoperable emergency communications nationwide in order to better protect the American people. Overall, the bill:

- Mandates a National Emergency Communications Report to recommend goals and timeframes for the achievement of redundant, sustainable, and interoperable emergency communications systems;
- Requires a baseline assessment of current emergency communications capabilities and periodic assessments on progress in filling in existing gaps;
- Accelerates the development of national standards for emergency communications equipment;
- Requires state and local governments to establish effective Statewide Interoperable Communications Plans before being able to use DHS grant funds for emergency communications;
- Facilitates coordination on emergency communications by establishing regional working groups comprised of federal, state and local officials, first responders, and other relevant stakeholders; and
- Elevates the importance of emergency communications within the Department of Homeland Security, enhancing accountability and resources to ensure first responders on the ground can communicate with one another.

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Prepared by the Committee on Homeland Security
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